Dek Unu Magazine
June 2025

Unending

Ismail Jaddi

Dek Unu Magazine

Cover **Untitled** ©Ismail Jaddi

Eleven

This is *Dek Unu Magazine*. In Esperanto, dek unu means "eleven." Eleven images from a single artist. Eleven artists in eleven solo issues in each publication year. Dek Unu publishes the work of a new artist-photographer in each issue. The artist's work and words are featured in individual focus as the sole purpose for each issue of the magazine. Unlike other arts and letters magazines which might look for work from a variety of artists to support an editorial staff's theme, at Dek Unu, theme and imagery are always each artist's own.

This Month

Moroccan artist-photographer Ismail Jaddi works by “feel.” He uses simple equipment and a wanderer’s openness to the situations and sights in the environment, as opposed to expensive equpment and studio set-ups, to make his art. The old maxim, “Be there and be packing,” applies to his approach; he packs either his cellphone or his highly portable Fujifilm XT-100 to assemble stories of Moroccan life and the interface of contemporary and traditional cultures. His striking black-and-white images are candid and momentary and, at the same time, thoughtfully, architecturally composed. Whether it’s kids at play, a man in solemn contemplation, a street scene in a splash of light, Jaddi places images in a frame —pictorial space observed and clarified by an artist’s eye. Beyond its design, each image tells a human story, seen and shaped by the artist’s empathetic understanding. Although genre labels are tricky, this series pairs with the photography international street and documentary style photographers like Henri Cartier-Bresson, Fan Ho, and Maggie Steber; Jaddi’s photographs prove that street photography is much more than pix snapped in the street and that the tourist’s view of “exotic Morocco” is far removed from the photographer’s view of “home.”

Children playfully observe their reflections, symbolizing the purity of how they see themselves. A mirror to the simplicity and joy of youth.

Reflection of Innocence

A spontaneous kick of a football captures energy and life, as the free spirit takes flight.

Kick of Hope

PARIS

The shadows blur the line between the body and the earth, suggesting belonging or exile, solitude or silent companionship.

Untitled

Children framed in small windows create their own worlds.

Windows to Imagination

A child embracing the sky, embodying boundless freedom.

Freedom Above

Identity, like time, is alway shifting. In *Unending,* the quest for self is not a point to reach but a process that unfolds. The portraits are never still, they are in a constant state of transformation, redefined with each glance and by the flow of time. We are not static beings, but rather fragments of our past selves, unraveling and evolving in every fleeting moment.

Untitled

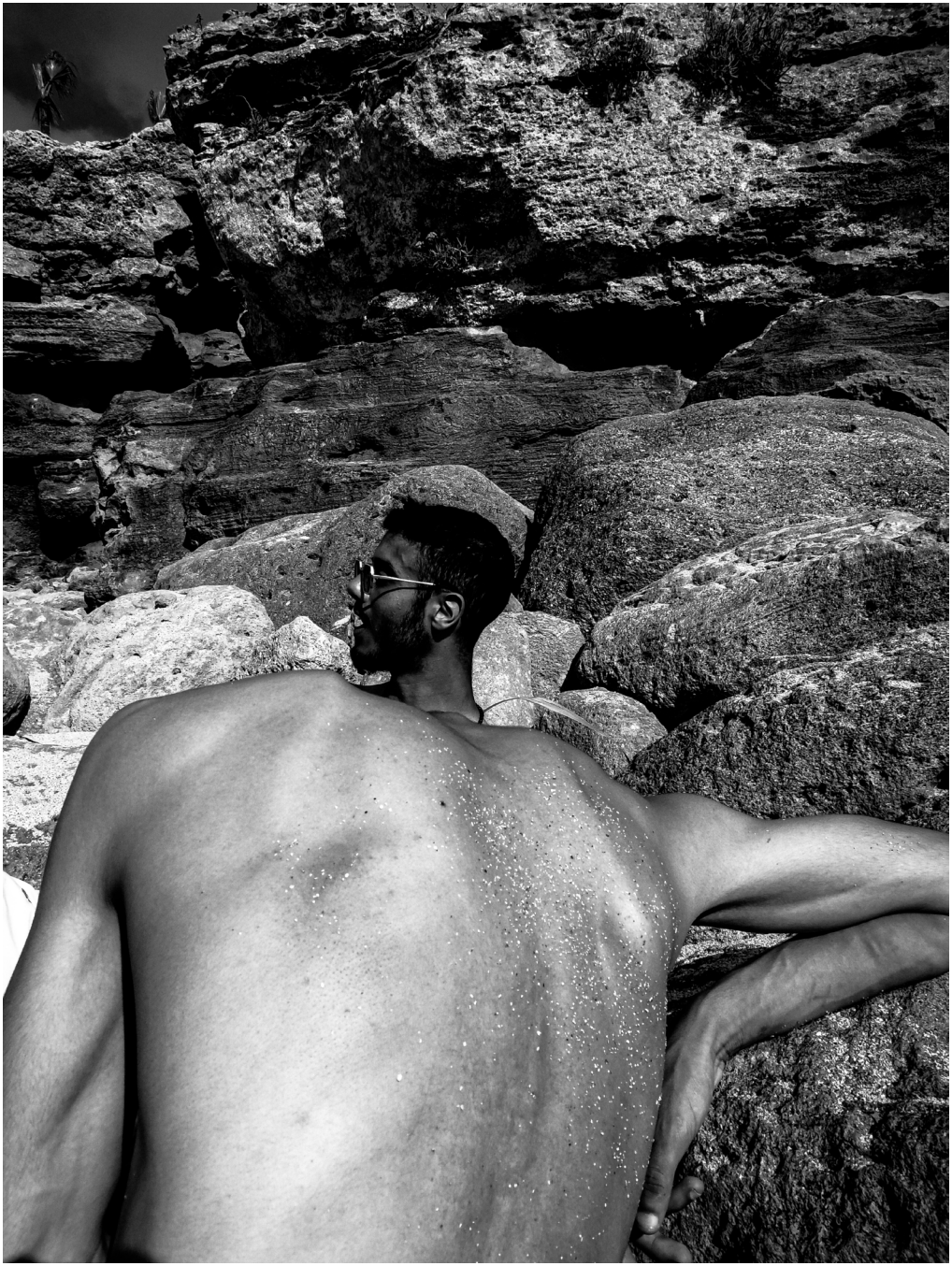
People walk alone but together in an open space, their shadows creating a conversation about distance and connection.

Intersecting Paths

Unending is not a story with a beginning or end. It's a process. A way of carrying weight without collapsing. A quiet fight against disappearance. Each image is a response to something I couldn't explain in any other way.

Sometimes, we survive by creating. Not because we are strong, but because we don't know what else to do. This project carries my grief, but also my will to stay. To feel. To exist.

Untitled



A quiet moment in a hammam, where the patterns on the walls reflect my own search for meaning in history and simplicity.

The Silent Hammam

In the water's reflection, we see both defiance and acceptance.
Life returns like waves—always leaving, always arriving.

Untitled

This image carries a mixture of despair and a clinging to hope. Two trembling hands, their fingers gripping the beach grass as if it were the last thread connecting them to life. Sometimes hope is as fragile as grass, yet it can be enough to survive.

Hope

Artist Interview - Ismail Jaddi

Most North Americans know very little about your home. What is Morocco like for you as a citizen? As an artist?

Morocco is home. Emotionally, visually, spiritually. It is a land of contrasts that shapes who I am. As a citizen, I feel its warmth and witness its struggles. I live within its beauty and its limitations. There is generosity in the culture and strength in the people, but also frustration in how systems and unspoken expectations can confine you.

Ismail Jaddi

As an artist, Morocco challenges and inspires me at the same time. The streets are alive with stories. The light is poetic. The silence in people's expressions speaks volumes. But making art here often feels like speaking in a language that not everyone understands or values. That only pushes me to go deeper. My photography becomes a personal necessity, a way of surviving and witnessing.

I love being Moroccan. It is not something I am proud of because pride suggests achievement. I did not choose this. It is a gift. But what I choose to do with it is what gives it meaning. Every image I create is a conversation between myself and this land.

The stereotypes cast Morocco as mysterious and dangerous. What should people know?

Moroccan people are like people everywhere in the world. What really sets us apart is culture, and of course, religion plays a role, just as Christianity does in many parts of the world, like in America. But at the end of the day, we all share the same human experiences, dreams, and struggles.

What people might not know about Morocco is that it's a land rich in art and creativity. We have a deep tradition of craftsmanship, music, and storytelling. Art here isn't just something we admire it's a form of resistance, even if it's not always recognized as such. In many parts of the world, especially in places like Morocco, art can be a quiet form of rebellion against what we're told to accept. It's a way for us to express the complexity of our lives, the beauty in our struggles, and the hope for change. We have always been creators, even in the face of adversity. Art has always been a way for us to hold onto our identity and to make sense of the chaos around us.

What's your origin story? Birth, childhood, school days? Any early memories or experiences that have made a difference?

I was born in Salé, one of the oldest cities in Morocco and in Africa. A city once feared for its pirates and now forgotten in many ways. But Salé breathes history. It holds in its narrow streets and crumbling walls a certain dignity. It is raw and real. That contradiction shaped me deeply.

I was an active child like many others. I ran, played football, climbed walls, tried parkour. But I was also someone who watched, who felt. I was drawn to silence, to small moments. My mother, the closest person to me, was always writing. She filled notebooks with stories, ideas, fragments. She never called herself a writer but that's exactly what she was. My father, a construction engineer, always carried a camera. He wasn't a professional but he photographed life as if trying to hold on to time. Between them I learned to see and to feel.

I can't say I had a nice childhood. It was full of events, some of them difficult, others confusing. But I'm grateful for all of it. Those experiences taught me to see life early. They taught me how to pay attention. I understood things at a young age, things most people ignore until much later. That early awakening came with a cost but it also gave me a language.

When did you start photography?

Photography has always been around me, especially since my dad was always with his camera. It's one of those things that feels like it's been part of me for as long as I can remember. As a teenager, full of dreams and desires to pursue

what I love, life, in its unpredictable way, pushed me into situations I never imagined. These challenges, whether within my family, sickness, or the judgments of society, were difficult to face, but the greatest battle was with myself. It's not easy to articulate these moments of struggle, so I turn to my photography as a language to express them.

I studied economics at first, searching maybe for something that made sense, something practical. But after three years I turned to architecture, perhaps because of my father or perhaps because I was still trying to find the right shape for myself. Photography and cinema never left me. They were always there. They weren't distractions. They were a form of truth. I didn't choose them. They chose me. They became the only way I could digest the world, speak to it, or resist it.

Do you remember an image or a moment when you realized that you could actually call yourself a photographer?

There wasn't a single "aha" moment or the first shot that changed everything for me, it's more of a continuous flow. But there is this one strange thing that I can't forget. It wasn't a big event, just a random moment that seemed to stick with me. I had this recurring image in my dreams or maybe nightmares is the better word. A girl, just a blurry shadow, always looking at me with these eyes full of fear, like she was trying to say something, but I could never fully understand. All she would say is, "Don't leave me alone." It wasn't a clear dream, just fragments that kept haunting me.

Then one day, while I was in Rabat, just walking around, lost in thought like I usually am, I saw something that felt like a scene pulled right out of my dreams. It wasn't a special moment, just another random encounter in life, but the connection I felt in that instant was undeniable. It was like

everything I had been feeling suddenly made sense. I didn't plan it, didn't even expect it, but that photo I took in that moment felt like a strange kind of closure, like I was capturing a piece of something I didn't even know how to express until I saw it in front of me.

There was a funny coincidence, actually. I was in Maggie Steber's masterclass and, while we were discussing our work, she showed me one of her photos. To my surprise, it looked so much like the one I had taken, the same feeling, the same haunting vibe. She called it "The Man from the Dream." And what really blew my mind was that she had the same dream-like connection with the image, just like I did with mine. It was surreal, almost as if we were tapping into the same subconscious space, both creating something that felt like it came from somewhere beyond us. I didn't know what to think of it at first, but it felt like one of those moments where the

universe is telling you that you're not alone in your thoughts or dreams. Funny how the dreams that haunt us sometimes connect us in the most unexpected ways.

You mention Steber's masterclass. Talk about the rest of your photo training. Formal, informal, darkroom, digital? Your skillful compositions suggest other fine arts in you past.

Apart from the influence of my dad, I mostly taught myself photography. I developed my perspective through experiences, observing nature, and the world around me. Nature, for me, has always been a place to escape, a space where I could truly be myself. It's where I found peace and clarity, allowing me to explore the world through my lens in a very personal way.

I spent a lot of time with my dad at his work, observing how structures and light interact, which influenced my feel for composition. Later, I pursued university architecture studies, which further refined my eye for detail and structure, helping me better understand the spatial relationships in my images. and taught me to focus on form, space, and light, which I apply when framing shots. I quite automatically and naturally think about balance, geometry, and how elements interact in the frame, which helps me create more intentional and dynamic images.

As for the technical side, I haven't really gone much through formal darkroom training. My process has always been digital, with minimal manipulation. I've leaned heavily on the freedom and flexibility that digital photography offers, but that doesn't mean I don't appreciate the art of traditional processes.

You always seem to be in the right place at the right time. What's your strategy? Planning? Lurking? Wandering? Luck?

When I go out, I don't have a specific style in mind or a rigid plan. I just let my thoughts and feelings guide me. I look for what resonates with the ideas I'm exploring, even if it's something simple, something unexpected. I try to find a moment where everything aligns, where the picture reflects what I'm trying to say. For me, it's not about fitting into a predefined category or following certain rules. It's like a conversation with the world; I don't know exactly what's going to happen, but I trust that I'll find what I need if I stay open to what's around me. It's more about the feeling than the technique, more about the connection between the moment and the message I want to express. In the end, the image is just a way to share something deeper, something that can't always be put into words. I'm constantly trying to make sense of the world, trying to understand the unspoken emotions, the quiet moments that others may overlook.

Talk about your creativity. What helps? Reading? Conversation? Early mornings? Late nights? Where do good ideas come from?

For me, creativity flows more naturally as a process rather than a specific formula. Ideas don't always come neatly packaged. Sometimes, it's the work that sparks the concept, other times, a great idea emerges first and then I search for the right imagery to express it. It's a constant back and forth, like discovering new paths.

I don't follow a strict schedule when it comes to taking pictures. I don't have set hours, but I do prefer being out there in the world, connecting with people, hearing their stories, and letting the environment guide me. It's a vibe, really. I trust that, in the right moment, the picture will come. Sometimes, I gravitate

toward minimalism, and other times, my approach is more chaotic. It all depends on how I connect with the subject and the emotions at play.

Creativity is about trusting the process and being open to whatever comes, whether it's late-night reflections or early morning thoughts. I find inspiration in many places, like books I read and the works of photographers who resonate with me. Getting the chance to connect with Adil Azemat and Maggie Steber personally has been a huge influence. Their critiques are invaluable, like a mirror reflecting parts of my work that I might miss. I believe criticism is essential—it's not about seeking validation, but about growth, about seeing things from another perspective.Conversations like those spark new ideas and help me refine my own creative approach. For me, it's a fluid journey, no rules, just moments that align.

Is there a political dimension to your work? A social message?

My work is not driven by political or social agendas; it is a search for something deeper, something spiritual. Art, for me, is about transcending the material world and exploring the

mysteries of life, time, and memory. I see myself as an artist who seeks truth not just the surface reality, but the profound, often unseen dimensions of human experience. My films, and my approach to photography, are meditative, slow, and reflective, allowing time and subtle details to reveal the emotional core of what it means to be human. In this quiet exploration, I believe art becomes a space for personal connection with the eternal, a way to question, reflect, and discover meaning in a world that is constantly shifting.

For some an image is not finished until it's printed. For you?

I completely understand that feeling. But when it comes to my series and my work, I find it hard to label anything as "finished" right now. This is actually one of the reasons why my project is called *Unending*. The ideas that fuel my work feel so vast, almost immortal, existential, and philosophical in nature. I believe these concepts don't have a definitive end. I will always stay loyal to those principles, as they define not just the project, but my approach to art itself.

What place do social media have in your practice?

Social media and electronic publication are tools to share my art, and that's really the point of it. I don't focus much on the noise around it. It's useful for getting my work out there, connecting with others who share similar interests, and maybe even discovering new perspectives. But I don't see it as anything more than a platform for exposure and dialogue. It's necessary, yes, but I try not to let it consume me or distract from the essence of what I do. The art comes first, and everything else is secondary.

Most of us have a framework for evaluating our own and other's work. What are your standards? What do you look for?

With my own work, it's about seeking meaning in life; that's what keeps me motivated. I don't have specific standards, but I

love exploring new ideas and pushing boundaries. I'm open to experimentation, so I'm not a "tough sell." I enjoy discovering unique perspectives and approaches, and I prefer to avoid anything that feels too predictable or lacks authenticity.

From *Bahlawan*

Generative AI is slowly entering some artists' tool kits. Has it found a place in your practice?

I have used it for translations in situations like this interview where language might be a barrier, but I don't think AI will find a place in my practice. AI is too perfect, and art, for me, is all about the imperfection. It's about the rawness, the flaws, and the unpredictable moments that make something real and human. The beauty of art lies in its imperfections those unplanned, spontaneous elements that reflect life itself. AI might replicate patterns and predict outcomes, but it can't capture the essence of human emotion, experience, and the struggle that goes into creating something truly meaningful. For me, that's what makes art, especially photography, so unique.

What about your gear? Tools and tricks of the trade?

I think what helped me is not having fancy equipment. It's a bit ironic, but most of my early series were captured with

my phone. It's only been a year since I got a proper camera, a Fujifilm XT-100. Before that, I'd use old cameras I found in markets or borrow from friends. The limitation actually pushed me to be more creative with what I had.

What's next? Travel? New projects? Changes predicted?

I feel the need to expand my horizons, both physically and artistically. The USA, with its vast artistic diversity, seems like the perfect place to gain new perspectives. Similarly, Tokyo, with its blend of chaotic energy and minimalist beauty, calls to me as a place to explore contrasts, both external and internal.

Currently, I'm working on a documentary project called *Akrach*. It's a personal exploration of the environmental crisis in Morocco, focusing on the impact of waste and neglect. This work aims to capture how uncontrolled dumping and lack of infrastructure are not just destroying landscapes but also affecting the lives of those who live close to these sites. Another ongoing project is *Bahlawan*, a portrait of a friend, a clown a mirror of sorts. Through his performances, laughter, and quiet breakdowns, I've come to see my own contradictions and desires. This series reflects on the delicate balance between persona and self, joy and exhaustion, capturing the subtleties of being human. Lastly, I'm collaborating with my friend, Anass Bencherif, on a short film. It's a new way for me to express my ideas, translating them into a cinematic language, something I'm excited to explore further.

And, the future of *Unending?*

Unending will continue to be my search for meaning in the chaos, an attempt to make sense of the contradictions between light and darkness, clarity and confusion. My images reflect this quiet resistance, where I confront my own vulnerabilities, not with words, but through the very act of creating. In this, I find solace, as each image is a step toward understanding and reconciliation with the complexities of life.

What I do now is not about aesthetics. It is about testimony. It is about memory, tension, survival. And in some way it's also about love for the people, for this land, for those invisible stories that still live in the shadows.

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